

ADDRESS OF THE VERY REV. THE DEAN OF ELY TO
THE HISTORICAL SECTION AT THE ANNUAL MEETING
OF THE INSTITUTE HELD AT BEDFORD.¹

You will, I am sure, easily understand how much I feel at a loss as to the point of view from which I should address you on the present occasion, when I consider how wide and comprehensive is the prospect which you open before me. The lecturer to the Historical Section of a curious and learned society may say to himself, *historicus sum, nihil historici a me alienum puto*. He may think that all historical incidents and speculations, and even prehistorical ones, are equally open to him. If he be of a discursive turn of mind, he can hardly fail to be oppressed and even confused by the unbounded licence of narrative and disquisition thus submitted to his discretion—if he seek to single out some particular object, and confine himself strictly within such limited bounds, he may too probably become very dry and jejune in his particular remarks, and to the generality of a mixed audience such as I may now see before me, he can hardly fail at least to appear so.

But with this apology by way of preface to the slight sketch of an address which is the best I can hope to offer you, I will proceed at once to explain the direction and the limits to which I propose to confine myself. Standing here in the town of Bedford, the capital of the county so named, before an audience, the greater part of which is, I suppose, composed of the inhabitants of this town and county, my object may properly be directed to illustrate the science of history itself by examples taken from the records of this particular locality. And first, my view of the science of history in general shall be confined to reference to three of what I should deem its most

¹ Delivered July 28th, 1881.

interesting subjects or features. We cultivate historical science, I think, mainly with a view to its political aspect, its social aspect, and its personal aspect. I will explain what I mean by these several aspects, as I call them, more particularly as I proceed, but I wish to impress you, at starting, with the three divisions of the subject which I shall place before you—the political, the social, and the personal or individual.

As to the first of these, Bedfordshire, I would remark, has no doubt taken some share in the great movements of English history which have affected our national government and constitution, and our relation to other countries. The political history of this county does, indeed, seem to me very scanty. Perhaps it is in consequence of our country being insular that the chief incidents in our national career have taken place rather in our maritime than our inland counties. Kent and Devon, Yorkshire and Norfolk have been more rife of political events than Berks or Leicester, or Bedford, or Huntingdonshire. The river, indeed, on which your capital stands, the river of which you are justly proud, as, at least, the fourth in rank of the whole kingdom, has done you the service, if such you would regard it, of wafting the barks of Danes and Northmen even to these inland recesses, and given you no mean place in the records of that ancient warfare which founded the English name and fame by the mingling of many rival, but not alien, races from which we are all proud to be descended. But from that primitive period onwards the course of your political history has run ever smoothly. Few or no traces are left among you of the Norman Conquest or the wars of the Barons, or the early constitutional struggles of church and people, or of the wars of the Roses, no, nor even of the contests of the great Rebellion and the still greater Revolution which followed. If a country is justly deemed happy the life of which is marked by little or no public history, so I suppose a county so circumstanced may be pronounced a happy county also. The placid stream of your gentle river Ouse may be justly considered typical of the *fallentis semita vitæ*, the unscanned path of domestic life, for which the county of Bedford is, I may say, if it be

not something of a bull to say it, so signally distinguished.

With one however of the greatest political changes in English history, with one change which amounts above all others to a revolution in our national constitution, Bedfordshire is specially connected. In referring to a political movement which took place three hundred and fifty years ago, which founded and established the most illustrious family in your county, I need not and I shall not, I am sure, offend in this place any natural susceptibilities. The history of the dissolution of the monasteries and the endowment of some of our illustrious private houses with their revenues, is now an old world story, almost as venerable as the story of the conquest of Saxon England by the Normans, or of our primeval Britain by the Romans. Nor shall I be led into uttering a word that can offend any religious and ecclesiastical sentiment that may be rife among you. I speak of this important and deeply interesting movement in its political and constitutional aspects, and those only. Now I regard the dissolution of the monasteries and the confiscation and fresh distribution of their revenues in this way. The Crown at the conquest became possessor of the soil of England. The Conqueror divided it into a number of fiefs, which he entrusted to his chief followers by grants, for the most part under military tenure. It was on their arms and those of their retainers that he relied for the maintenance of the conquest and the political settlement which he grafted on it. The ground of this alliance was however insecure. Jealousies and dissensions speedily arose between the Crown and its great vassals. The Crown became weakened by family quarrels. The Barons became strengthened by family alliances. The war of the Barons against John and Henry III left the government of the country in the hands of an Oligarchy rather than of a Monarch. It was by the alliance the Crown thereupon made with the Church that any fair balance was alone effected between these rival powers; it was by the great abilities of such sovereigns as Edward I and III and Henry IV that such a balance was generally secured and maintained. But the history of our kings from John to Henry VIII shows the constant struggle that was still

going on between the Crown and the nobles. The fall of John and Edward II, and Richard II, and Henry VI, and Richard III, one after another, shows how the power of the nobles waxed stronger and stronger, and was at last curbed and checked, scotched but not killed, by the bloody wars and hardly less bloody executions of the contests of the Roses.

It was not till after the settlement of this terrible struggle by what I may call the Tudor compromise that the Crown seemed to obtain the upper hand over the nobles, and felt itself so far secure as to enable it to turn its attention to the overshadowing influence which had now been acquired by the Church, to which it had itself been accessory in its wish to establish an alliance which might countervail the power of the great territorial feudatories. I forget what is said to have been, at the beginning of the sixteenth century, the proportion of the soil of England held by the Church as its own consecrated property. I believe it was as much as one-third or two-fifths, perhaps more. The power which this immense proprietorship gave to one estate of the realm, one factor in the national legislature and government, and one which was specially under the influence or even the control of a foreign potentate (and remember that the Pope of Rome, however small were his actual estates, was through his spiritual influence a real political force at that time in Europe), this ecclesiastical power was a source of great danger to the Crown and a cause of intense dissatisfaction to the mass of the people.

This then was the power which Henry VIII determined to master, with a daring and a courage for which he has not always received sufficient credit, with a daring and a courage which none perhaps in those days but a man of stern, of cruel, of tyrannical character could have exhibited. Henry's first object was to cut down the power of the Church and confine it within safe and constitutional limits, safe as regarded the legitimate authority of the Crown, constitutional as regarded the just influence of the nobility and gentry and commons of the realm. But I see, as I think, plainly, that he had also a second object, and this was to strengthen his own position against the remnant, still powerful, of the old

oligarchy. It was with this view, as I imagine, that he distributed the vast estates which he wrenched from the Church and from the monasteries, among those whom historians call his favourites, men for the most part not of the first nobility, taken rather from a second class of gentry, of whose personal loyalty to himself he felt pretty well assured, and whom he might expect to bind more closely to his interests by making their interests coincide so closely with his own. The Russells and their compeers whose noble fortunes he founded by this great political revolution became, as he expected, the firmest support of his throne and of the constitutional system which he so signally founded. The principles of government on which the illustrious house of Bedford was raised to eminence and enriched with so large a portion of the conventual estates in this county have been, we know, loyally maintained by all its scions through many generations. There are perhaps few instances in history of a great idea thus cast into the ground and continuing to bear its proper fruit so constantly and so permanently as the constitutional settlement of Henry VIII both in Church and State. Of the ecclesiastical aspect of Henry's Revolution I have hardly leisure now to speak, but it is patent to every one. It would be very interesting to enter into the economical aspect which it also presents to us in the history of our proprietary system, but this is a work too large and too subtle for so slight a sketch as I must confine myself to. I have said enough, however, to show how important a part this county has played, at least in one special instance, on the political history of England, in the history of those great constitutional changes which from time to time seem to sweep over all civilized countries in turn; such changes as were introduced by the famous agrarian laws at Rome, or by the forcible repartition of all the soil of France at the still more famous French Revolution, or by the abolition of serfdom in our own time in Russia, such as may occur again under, I trust, more moderate counsels and with a more enlightened policy even in our own favoured islands to-day or to-morrow.

But I gladly turn from the political speculation which my subject has now forced upon me to a view of your

county history in what I would call its social aspect. The annals of civilization present to us the efforts, the instinctive efforts I might say, of man to increase the prosperity and happiness of himself, and, together with himself, of his family and neighbours, his fellow-countrymen. The early progress of this and other countries in Europe from barbarism to moral and spiritual culture has been marked by the institution of schools of teaching and learning. Western Europe, France and Germany, Spain and Italy, as well as our own country, first emerged from barbarism, under the teaching of the Christian Church. The Cathedrals and the Convents offered the first schools for a learning which was for the most part—though not wholly—directed to matters of religious faith and knowledge and speculation. But such learning, limited as it was, occupied in fact almost the whole area of human inquiry; such was then possible. The schools of the palace, the political training schools of Charlemagne, were indeed schools for laymen, schools for training the civil servants of the State; but the training they offered was, I imagine, directed more to the arts of government and administration than to imparting the facts of moral or material science. Of these cathedral schools and of their system of teaching, founded as they were more than a thousand years ago, there still exist among us some scanty survival. The cathedrals of this country all made provision for the regular training of clergy, and of such of the laity as chose to avail themselves of it, in the institution of the Christian believer, which embraced pretty generally the whole field of the knowledge of those early times. The statutes even now existing of our older cathedrals, drawn up no doubt on the lines of statutes of a still earlier period, all provide for a school of divinity, and constitute one or more members of the cathedral body as its head and teacher. Such was the educational training of several ages; it dates at least from Charlemagne, and even he learnt it from Alcuin and the cathedral school of York. It was only gradually supplanted by the foundation of the universities and the colleges, but from the thirteenth centuries and onwards it was to the universities that our people looked for their teaching, no longer to the cathedrals. They found

no doubt at Oxford and Cambridge a broader and more liberal learning, a wider grasp of moral and material truth, than in the narrow sphere of the cathedral, and the technical and professional learning of a small cathedral body. The cathedral schools dwindled away; the name still survived, as indeed it does even now survive, but it ceased to betoken any real practical service. A better system had come into operation, and the worsser system suffered inevitable eclipse. Accordingly, when at the Reformation, the Government undertook to establish several new cathedrals, it abstained purposely and pointedly, as it seems to me, from assigning to any of them the function of theological teaching or the training of young men in religious knowledge. This was considered to be already adequately provided for at the universities. Indeed, as at the former period society had been prone to found cathedrals and monasteries for the teaching of theology—as in a later year society had adopted the fashion of endowing universities and colleges with this object specially in view—so already in the fifteenth and sixteenth centuries the latter fashion was beginning to subside, and a new idea of the objects and means of education had sprung up in the country. Already the great schools of Winchester and Eton had given the signal of a new social revolution. It was to the education of the rising generation, to the training of boys, to the training of the opening mind in the best general knowledge of the day rather than in the technical and professional training of a clerical class, that the minds of our statesmen were turned. To this movement, to this social revolution, as it may be fairly called, the Reformation of Religion gave a special impulse—the fashion of founding schools, grammar schools, free schools, meaning schools free from ecclesiastical control to which all teaching had formerly been subjected, made rapid progress. To this the young scholarly king Edward VI lent all his influence and authority, and by the advice of his ministers, pledged as they were to the principles of the Reformation, he founded such grammar schools at many of the provincial cities of his kingdom. His views were seconded by his sister Elizabeth, who founded Westminster School, and by many private benefactors; by

John Lyon, who founded Harrow; by Sherreff, who founded Rugby; Perse, who founded the Grammar School at Cambridge; and by many others whose names I cannot remember at Tiverton and Sherborne, and a hundred other places. Nor did this beneficent social wave fail to flow over your own town of Bedford. The foundation of Sir William Harpur in this place still attests the interest which any gentleman, any prosperous man of business, any devout admirer of learning for its own sake, was eager and proud to take in the culture of the youth of a place with which he might have any special personal connexion. Sir William Harpur has left the name well remembered and highly honoured among you. I believe I follow the habit of the place in thus connecting it with the important Grammar School which has conferred so much benefit upon you. But strictly speaking this school too was, I understand, originally founded by King Edward VI; at least he it was who first granted his royal license to your Mayor and Corporation to establish such a school; and it was not till a few years later that Sir William Harpur, a native of your parish at St. Paul's, took upon himself to endow it with the rents of a small estate of some thirteen acres, which, as a prosperous man of business, he had been able to acquire in the parish of St. Andrew's, in London. I know his estate there pretty well. I know Harpur-street, which stands apparently in the centre of the little domain. I know the neighbouring streets, North-street and East-street, and Theobald-road, and Lamb's Conduit-street, somewhat poor and petty streets now, but which have seen better days, and been much resorted to, from their neighbourhood to the Inns of Court, by the class of young struggling barristers. I was myself born in East-street, and such was the position of my father at the time of his marriage very early in the present century. I saw a notice of apartments to let in the windows of my native domicile not long ago, and I stepped in, and found the poor little house all now let out in single rooms to a number of, as I suppose, clerks, in shops or at lawyers' chambers. Such are the resources on which your great Harpur foundation rests, and I rejoice to hear that a locality which was originally purchased for £180 now produces a

rental of some £15,000 a year. *Lucri bonus est odor ex re qualibet.* I feel some interest in the Harpur School from thinking that my father paid for several years his seventy or eighty pounds per annum to swell an income that has been put to so excellent an account.

I have instanced the Harpur School of this town as typical of a great social revolution. The change in our national ideas and views of life, which was effected by the institution of our grammar schools at the period of the Reformation, of which schools this one of yours is so conspicuous an example, may indeed fitly deserve such a title; for a revolution of this kind is not necessarily a work of injustice, of violence, or of bloodshed. It implies a great and decisive change in life and manners, but it may be quite peaceful in its working, and mainly salutary in its effect. Now the change wrought by the institution of the grammar schools was of this kind. It opened the sources of ordinary secular knowledge to all classes of the nation, from their boyhood onwards. It imbued the whole body of the nation from their opening years with the habit of intellectual exertion and inquiry. It released learning from the church authority exercised by the ecclesiastical teaching in the cathedrals and convents; it relaxed and reduced within moderate limits the professional authority, hardly less pedantic and peremptory, which had long prevailed even in colleges and universities, where the dogmas of Aristotle were enforced as strictly as if they had been divinely inspired. The method of teaching in boys' schools was freed at once from all such imperious prescriptions. It could not be otherwise. Set a lad down with fifty lines of Homer before him, and place a grammar and a dictionary in his hands, and direct him to make out the meaning for himself, and you at once introduce him to the deep mysteries of independent responsibility and private judgment. He must learn for himself and judge for himself. He has become free to inquire, to compare and to determine—nay, he is commanded to do so. He is now a free intellectual agent, and every day, as it makes him more familiar with the arduous process, gives him more confidence in his own decision, and makes him more and more sensible of his advance in the judgment,

in the tact, in the instinct, I may say, that instruct him in the comparison of one language with another. He feels, indeed, the more he advances, all the more, perhaps, if he is a sensible boy does he feel the advantage of having a master as guide and teacher over him, to supply his deficiencies and direct him in difficulties; but still, if again he is a sensible boy, he comes more and more to feel that it is with his own grammar and with his own dictionary after all that he gains the victory.

Now what intellectual training this is! The young student thus goes forth from school accustomed to the use of his own personal judgment. He has thus acquired his knowledge of his Greek and his Latin, and he knows how he acquired it. Shall he not go on in the strength of that success, and apply to all other matters of intellectual interest that now solicit his ripper understanding, the same process of thinking for himself, judging for himself, deciding and dogmatising perhaps on his own responsibility? The Reformation had but just now declared the right of private judgment in the highest of all intellectual concerns, the pursuit of religious knowledge. It had appointed pastors and masters to be always at hand to guide, encourage and persuade; but it had finally conceded to the conscience of the individual learner the duty of working out his own education by the reasoning power which God had given him. The Grammar schools taught our children to cultivate from the first that independence of judgment in lesser matters which they must ultimately exercise on their own responsibility in the largest and the highest. And so it was. The working of the Grammar Schools soon made itself manifest among us. The boy became father of the man. The same generation of Englishmen which had worked its way through grammar and syntax into Homer and Virgil, by the strength of its own skill and will, grew up to examine boldly and confidently all the mysteries of religious knowledge, and all the knotty points of political thought and speculation. Of course it was to be expected—it should at least have been expected—that the generation to whom this new revelation of its powers, its rights, its duties, was thus suddenly made, should rush with some precipitation upon problems which man has never

yet been able to solve, should be somewhat intoxicated with its own independence, should brandish too defiantly the charter of its liberties in the face of old tradition and venerable authority. The rapid, the furious progress of freedom of thought, became first conspicuous, and appeared alarming in religious matters. The church, as an institution resting, in its secular aspect, on the ideas of a revered antiquity, and some still lingering pretensions to legitimate rule, was the first to suffer from the unchained excesses of intellectual independence; but neither did the State, as you well know, long escape from the effects of this unrestrained licence. The great social revolution of which I have spoken, though it began in simple and hopeful innocence, did not, it must be confessed, run its course without a fatal and bloody consummation. But the evil has been checked; the good out of which it sprang, has waxed more abundant and more conspicuous ever since. The fumes of national intoxication, as I have called it, have, I hope, passed away; the system of the body politic has been, I think, purged and strengthened. We still continue to foster in our schools the priceless habit of self-exertion, of private inquiry, the priceless right of intellectual independence; but I am well convinced that the rival claims of liberty and authority, both in Church and State, are better understood and more happily adjusted, more permanently balanced now than heretofore; the good remains, the evil passes away here as elsewhere.

I have still reserved for myself a third aspect of history to which I could wish to direct your attention; but the time warns me that I can do no more than briefly indicate it. I just hinted at what I meant by the title I gave it of *personal* or *individual* history. But a few of us, perhaps, take much interest in the wider subjects of historical inquiry; in the vast field of social and political speculations. To discuss them adequately, or to turn the undistracted attention upon them, requires no doubt a formed and long-trained habit of mind. But every one, I suppose, takes an interest in the portraits of individual character which history everywhere presents to us. Every one likes to see the personal representation of hero, sage, and statesman, in his pictured portrait; and hardly less

is the pleasure we take in the lively descriptions of character which some of our consummate artists, a Tacitus, a Gibbon, or a Macaulay, have impressed upon their printed pages. Now the history of England is singularly rich in such individual presentment. This is in a great measure due to the free institutions under which Englishmen have lived, and their character grown and developed. It is also due in no slight degree to our national activity of mind and body ; to the great variety of pursuits which have been ever open to us ; to the force of sentiment, the strength of imagination in which no nation, at least of modern times, has rivalled us ; to the determination implanted so commonly in us, " Ever to be the foremost, and all men else excel," as Homer said of the model heroes of Greece of old. The strongly marked individual character of the ancient Romans, and the striking variety of their tastes and dispositions, has always had a great attraction for me ; but I confess that the variety of English character, and the distinction of man from man among us, very far exceeds it, and tends to give a special interest to our local and county history no less than to the general history of the English people. No doubt it is from the narrow scope of my own reading of the annals of Bedfordshire that I find myself, on reflection, almost wholly unable to single out any individual character from among you to whom to point as interesting in themselves or illustrative of your type. I pray you to excuse me, and pity me, and by and by enlighten me, as I have no doubt your local antiquaries and historians will be well able to do. There is, however, an old Greek saying, as I remember, which advises us that every one who undertakes to make a public harangue at Athens must take care to sing the praises of the goddess Athene, the pride and the patroness of that most illustrious of cities. And so I imagine, anyone who undertakes to address the citizens of Bedford must remember to laud and magnify him whom I may almost call the patron saint, the pride and glory of your pleasant town, the famous John Bunyan. But what can I do ? the wind has been taken out of my sails. Who can hope to say anything more in praise of John Bunyan since the utterance of that splendid eulogy which I have been just reperusing, by Lord Macaulay, and the scarcely

less splendid and perhaps more subtle and discriminate characterization, to which I can only refer from memory, by my own dear, lost friend, Dean Stanley. I would rather content myself with showing how the character and the achievements of the immortal Pilgrim may be connected with what I have been just now saying of the spread of general education, and the habits of free thought thereby engendered. Bunyan, indeed, does not seem to have enjoyed the advantage of a thorough training at your Harpur School, but he, too, had received a smattering of the art of reasoning and learning; he had had the opportunity of acquiring the habit of looking out words for himself in his own dictionary, of examining into rules of syntax for himself in his own grammar. At all events he was brought up in an atmosphere of free inquiry and private judgment, and this advantage his natural temper inclined him to make the most of. The people of Bedfordshire were then, perhaps they are still, strong partisans of liberty of thought and conscience, of independent speculation, very vehement in their repudiation of the claims or pretensions of authority. It will be allowed that Bunyan pushed his claims to intellectual freedom to the utmost, and carried his assertion of liberty to the very verge of licence. He suffered for it bravely as he had urged it boldly; but it must be ever remembered that in defying the law, however hard and oppressive we in our milder times may deem that law to have been, he was really outraging the common feeling of his contemporaries, who were by no means disposed as a whole to admit of the wanton extremes of opinion into which some ardent spirits were prematurely betrayed. The nation as a whole was not prepared for Bunyan's extreme views, either religious or political. I think he was before his time; but his time has almost come round, so far at least that we are all now united in admiration of his excellences and indulgence to his excesses.

But among the many demands which Bunyan's "Pilgrim's Progress" makes upon our attention, I will only detain you for a moment longer by adverting to one peculiarity in it. The "Pilgrim's Progress" was ushered into the world at the moment, the critical moment, I may call it, when the stained glass windows

were coming down with a crash from cathedrals and churches throughout the land. The Scriptural pictures in those windows were meant to be, and to a great extent they really had been, the schoolmaster of an illiterate people, leading them unto Christ. Few could decypher Bible or Book of Prayer; but all could recognise in the brilliant colours before them the representation of the Bible stories which were from time to time recited in their ears. Such were the people's books, such was education for the million, in the early days before the Reformation. When the Reformation came, and in the angry and bitter days that followed, these picture books were passionately destroyed. They were too closely connected with the fictions and superstitions of the past to be generally tolerated. And besides this they had ceased to be necessary. The Bible had been translated and printed and hung up in every church for the people to read, and the people were now taught in their grammar schools throughout the land to read it. No—the stained glass was no longer a help to religious knowledge, it was rather a hindrance. It obstructed light. The people could not read their printed pages in chambers so wantonly darkened. The sun of heaven was shut out from the churches; the Sun of righteousness, they might murmur, was excluded from their minds and consciences. But then, to come at last to my point, came forth the printed pictures, the pen and ink sketches of Bunyan's immortal work. The story of the Pilgrim and his eventful journey, of all the toils and perils he underwent, of the sloughs through which he waded, the mountains he climbed, the monsters he encountered, with the scriptural names and associations attached to them, appealed to the reader's imagination, and became reflected in mental pictures, more brilliant and more lasting than stained glass, which no hand of man's violence could thenceforth blur or break. The history of the Pilgrim is a picture gallery, a series of scriptural pictures, of pictures which require no churches or cathedrals to give them a local habitation; but which, once received on the retina of the mental eye, remain as long as life endures the property and the cherished treasure of the receiver. If the stained windows represented the incidents of religious story, the page of Bunyan

realized to all its readers the truths and dogmas of religion which actually underlie them, such as they appeared to the artist and the author himself. I would say then, that Bunyan's work deserves our special attention on this ground, that it came forth just at the time, just at the critical conjecture, when it could do most good, and filled the gap in religious teaching which was threatened at least by the destruction of our painted Scriptures. And so I will beg leave to close this address, thanking you for the indulgence you have shown to the criticisms crudely hazarded by a stranger.